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UNCLAS DUSHANBE 002063

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STATE FOR EUR/CACEN, SA

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: TOWN AND GOWN CLASH OR YOUTH FRUSTRATION WITH FUTURE PROSPECTS?

1. (U) Police arrested five people December 16 after two days of physical clashes between urban and rural youth in the northern city of Khujand. Local youth started a fight with Khujand State University students from the rural Mastchoh district in a public billiards hall on December 13. The Mastchoh students attempted to retaliate by calling in compatriots from the Mastchoh district. The two groups scheduled a confrontation for the next day at a local market. Police brought in additional militia to prevent a violent outburst. Some 50 young people threw stones at the police cars and quickly dispersed.

2. (U) Mastchoh, 55 kilometers north of Khujand, relies on cotton as the primary income. Unemployment in Mastchoh is higher than the national average and many men migrate to Russia for work. Khujandis have traditionally been the region's economic and political leaders and enjoy greater economic prosperity than Mastchoh.

3. (U) COMMENT: Given the history of the region, Embassy sources speculate young men are frustrated by increased unemployment. Provocations from Khujandis may have fueled anger based on regional prejudices and stereotypes. Although authorities managed to avert a violent clash this time, unemployment creates a growing atmosphere of frustration and lack of hope in Tajikistan's future among the young. With 52 percent of all Tajiks under the age of 19, this is a sector of the population that the government must attend to closely. END COMMENT.

ARMBRUSTER

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